

# NEW AND LOCAL KIN GROUPS AMONG THE JAPANESE FARMERS OF KONA, HAWAII

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WHEN a new social group—such as a group of immigrants in a new land—is organized, new social relationships must be formed. The structure of these new relationships is, as a rule, based on the pattern of the old network of relationships as they existed in the original social situation—for an immigrant group, as they existed in the “old country.”

Of all the relationships involved in any social organization kin relationships, real or fictitious, are among the most important. This is especially true of preliterate and folk communities.

According to Davis and Warner, “Kinship is a concept that touches two levels of phenomena. On the one hand it refers to a relatively fixed biological structure, on the other to a relatively variable social pattern based on this biological structure.”<sup>1</sup> The biological basis of kinship is the same in all human society: a primary sex relationship between a man and a woman, a parent-child relationship between these two and their offspring and a sibling relationship between the offspring. From these elementary groupings kin relationships may be traced indefinitely upward, outward, and downward from ego. The extent to which the kin relationships are recognized in a society determines the *range* of that society’s kinship system. This recognition of kinship relationships is a social phenomenon and as such varies from society to society.

The various forms of kinship have served as one of the more important methods of classifying societies from Morgan to Radcliffe-Brown. Because of the basic reality of biological ties in human affairs, kinship ties are among the most important of human relationships. It is thus not surprising to find the concept of kinship extended in many societies to include fictitious relationships as, for instance, in clan organization. A newcomer to a region, such as for instance an anthropologist, frequently finds that the only way to live in a preliterate society is to have some family adopt him and thus create for him kinship ties and, consequently, a place in the society.

Another important tie in preliterate groups is the territorial one—the integrated local group. Frequently, the local group relationships and those of kinship overlap as, for instance, in Dobu. At any rate the local group constitutes an important part of the network of social relations in preliterate and folk communities.

<sup>1</sup> Kingsley Davis and W. Lloyd Warner, *Structural Analysis of Kinship* (American Anthropologist, Vol. 39, No. 2), p. 292.

In Western city civilization both the kin ties and the local group ties have been greatly reduced. The ties of kinship are frequently restricted to the immediate family, and frequently not even to them.

Perhaps the most important new social group created in the city is the occupational group. Men of the same occupation organize themselves into clubs. The whole category of clubs and “societies” such as the Benevolent Order of Elks are reformations on a new basis of the old close social relationships of the local group and the kin group. Note the emphasis on the term *brother* among fellow fraternity members and *sister* among sorority members.<sup>2</sup>

One of the best ways to observe the way in which these kin and local group substitutes arise is to examine the way in which an immigrant group from an old peasant country reorganizes itself in America. As the individual immigrants gather in some region in the new land, they have no real kin ties or any real local group ties. Whereas the local groups can be fairly easily reorganized as a neighborhood group and many of the local group’s functions in the old country may be carried on in the new, kin organization cannot be so easily recreated. A study of an immigrant group, the Japanese in Kona, Hawaii, may well serve to bring out some of the ways in which the old kin group is reorganized and its functions performed by means of the creation of kin substitutes.

In Japan, especially rural Japan, the extended family is one of the more important social groups. In Hawaii, on the other hand, there are almost no extended kin groups among the older, first generation Japanese. This paper attempts to show how the functions of the old kin group are still carried on by other special groups which we may term *kin substitutes*.<sup>3</sup> In Kona, a coffee growing district on the island of Hawaii, the Japanese community, including storekeepers and coffee farmers, is about twenty-five hundred, distributed over an area of some fifty square miles. While the oldest Japanese inhabitants came over forty years ago, most of the “old folks” have been in Kona only fifteen or twenty years. With few exceptions the families now growing coffee were first employed on sugar and pineapple plantations in other parts of the Territory.

Almost forty per cent of the older people in the district were born in the one prefecture of Kumamoto, and as the writer spent a full year in a

<sup>2</sup> Note also the recent rise of the “big sister” on the university campuses of the United States—upper class girls who show freshmen around during the first weeks at college.

<sup>3</sup> While some studies have been made of the reorganization of kin groupings in immigrant communities, most of these have been made in cities, e.g., *The Ghetto*, by Louis Wirth, and *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, by Thomas and Znaniecki.

small village in Kuma County, Kumamoto Prefecture, during 1935-36<sup>4</sup> he is in a position to compare the social forms of Kona with those of Kumamoto.

In rural Kumamoto, as in most of rural Japan, the most important local groups are the household or small family and the small, geographically contiguous local community called *buraku*. Most villages (*mura*) contain several such *buraku* which were perhaps once separate villages. To give a brief outline of the social life in rural Kumamoto it will be necessary to outline both the functions of the household and the extended family on the one hand and of the *buraku* on the other, as the two are in many ways interdependent.

A household contains, as a rule, a master (*koshu*), his wife, first son (*chonan*), first son's wife, the unmarried children of the master and any children of the first son. In addition there may be an old father who has retired from active life besides a manservant and a maidservant. The group of households are united by a common territory, but their paddy rice fields and upland vegetable fields may be widely scattered all over the village or even in the next village. Population in a *buraku* is reckoned by households rather than by persons.

The *buraku*, made up of fifteen or twenty such households, functions chiefly as a cooperative entity. The cooperation takes several forms, the chief of which are:

1. *Civic cooperation*. When roads are cleaned or repaired or a bridge built a member of each household, either man or woman, turns out to do the work. *Buraku* heads oversee the work and decide the day on which it is to be done. When the work is finished a small drinking party is held, financed by a contribution of ten *sen* or so from each house.
2. *Helping cooperation*. One man from each household in the *buraku* helps a man to build a new house or repair a roof. This involves an obligation on the part of the householder to feed the helpers and in turn to help any of them when they build a house. Similar cooperation comes into play at funerals. After any such helping cooperation a drinking party is given at the expense of the person aided.
3. *Exchange labor*. At rice transplanting it is desirable, almost necessary, for many people to work together. For this purpose a specific group of five or six houses joins together to transplant the seedlings of each member in turn. At the end of transplanting the exchange group holds a party together. The members of such groups remain constant from year to year and the party at the end rotates from house to house each year.

<sup>4</sup> On a grant from the Social Science Research Committee of the University of Chicago. The Kona Research was made under the auspices of the University of Hawaii.

4. *Rotating responsibility for certain buraku affairs by small groups*. Thus, at the celebration of *buraku* festivals a given three or four families will gather in a small wooden structure (*doh*) where a deity, usually Buddhist, is enshrined and serve tea and beans to visitors. One group will serve one year, a different group of three or four houses the next year and so on.

The various cooperative and exchange systems act as integrating forces in the *buraku* by bringing people together in common labor followed by drinking parties which engender a feeling of friendliness and well being. Furthermore, these systems can be used as a form of social sanction. A farmer who does not meet his obligations may be effectively disciplined by withholding cooperation from him at rice transplanting, housebuilding and burial.

The role of kinship is most important in the elementary family contained in the household unit with its three to four generations living together. Here the master's word is law. Most daily farm labor is done by this relatively permanent kin group, even the servants being hired on a yearly basis and treated as members of the family. It is not unusual for a man to adopt a man servant and, on the other hand, a servant is often a nephew or niece of the head or his wife.

The eldest son is born, marries and dies in the same house. Other children remain in the family of orientation till of age when through marriage, adoption or the establishment of a branch family they set up separate families of their own.

Almost every family has relatives in the village and in nearby villages. This extended kin group functions at all life's crises and on special occasions such as New Year's. At a naming ceremony only a few nearby relatives are invited, also a few neighbors.

At marriage all arrangements are made by the families involved with the aid of go-betweens, the immediate principals having little to say in the matter. From the point of view of social value to the family the marriage is the most important of life's crises. Through marriage come heirs and on heirs depend the future welfare of the family; and through heirs one's memorial tablets (*ihai*) are properly cared for. It is not surprising, then, to find the go-between who acts as intermediary for this event becoming thereafter something of a relative—being invited to naming ceremonies and often coming as a mourner to a funeral in the family. At the wedding, with its great importance to the family, relatives from far and near are called and there is a great banquet. The *buraku's* interest in the event is recognized by the *chanomi*, a *buraku* party given the day after the wedding.

There is a regular form of action at funerals and help given in case of

disaster. While relatives in and out of the village gather inside the house and, as mourners, do nothing toward helping except for those close relatives who assist in putting the body in the coffin just before the funeral service, two people from each house of the local *buraku* come to help in preparing funeral things such as the coffin and grave lanterns, cooking funeral food and digging the grave. During the funeral service and banquet the *buraku* helpers eat and drink food provided by the family outside or in a back room, while relatives partake of a more elaborate feast together with the priest who reads the funeral service. Relatives gather together at several regular intervals, seven in all, after the funeral for memorial services. At death the family loses a member and comes together to mourn the event. The *buraku* also loses a member, but being larger than the family is not so seriously affected, so while they turn out to aid the unfortunate family at the funeral itself, they have no concern with the memorial services.

Beside the three crises of life there are certain other occasions for the gathering of the extended family—at New Year's, at *Bon* and for a family council.

New Year's time is an important one for the family in Japan. The holidays usually last several days and during this period relatives call on one another, take gifts, and give banquets. Usually a family makes a round of calls on the husband's relatives in one year and on the wife's kin the next, the whole family going together. There is no special activity by the *buraku* as such at New Year's time.

*Bon* season in July is the festival of the dead, at which time, it is believed, the spirits of the dead return to their former earthly abodes. Any house in the *buraku* that has lost a member during the past year holds a *First Bon* party. Members of the *buraku* call with gifts of lanterns or incense, and relatives do the same. The banquet itself is primarily for the relatives but *buraku* people are also welcome.

Besides these recurrent occasions, whenever a man contemplates any important step in life such as the marriage of one of his children or the purchase or sale of land, he calls a council of the extended family to discuss the matter.

The extended family, then, comes together and functions as such on five important occasions:

1. Marriage
2. Death and Memorial Services
3. New Year's Festival
4. *Bon*
5. Family Council

Other lesser occasions in which some members of the kin group beyond the household cooperate and gather together are:

1. Exchange labor
2. Naming ceremony

In only two of these seven various meetings is the *buraku* as such directly involved—both matters concerning the dead—at funerals where its co-operation is needed to provide the necessary articles for a funeral and food for use and consumption of the mourners, and at *Bon*. Exchange labor, also, is frequently within the *buraku* as it is not practical to exchange at too great a distance; and a few *buraku* neighbors may come in to a naming ceremony.

We may now contrast the social situation in Kumamoto with that to be found in Kona, Hawaii.

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In Kona the Japanese population is predominant, forming over 70 per cent of the total. Of the heads of eight hundred odd Japanese families, very few have any blood relatives in the Territory of Hawaii and still fewer have any in Kona itself. This is a natural corollary of the fact that the Japanese in Hawaii form an emigrant group, the emigrants being made up of the following types: (1) Men of families who were poor in Japan and hoped to make a fortune by coming to Hawaii; (2) Men recently discharged from the army after the Russo-Japanese War with a bonus in hand who came to Hawaii to seek a living; (3) Young men, often in their teens, who left Japan to seek adventure and become independent of their families.

Most of these individuals set out across the seas to solve some personal problem, and in so doing left all their relatives back home. After a few years, not making the expected fortune with which to return to Japan, many men sent back to their native prefectures in Japan for wives. Thus arose the well known custom of the picture bride. To this day, however, there are many old bachelors among the Japanese in Hawaii, a situation in sharp contrast to rural Japan, where all but the lame and the halt are married.

The Japanese in Kona have organized themselves into cooperative groups (*kumi*) of fifteen to twenty-five or more households each with a name and a head. In some parts of Kona these groups are united into *mura* just as *buraku* are united into *mura* in Japan. The *kumi* are purely geographical just as the *buraku* are geographical in Japan and, similarly, their primary function is mutual aid in such events as funerals and house-building.

Unlike the *buraku* in Japan where houses are in close clusters, houses in

Kona are far apart and frequently people scarcely know some of the members of their own *kumi*. Houses are isolated, hidden away in the coffee lands. The local group in Hawaii, though based on that of rural Japan, is less closely integrated socially.

The roads and bridges are taken care of by the government, so that the *kumi* does not function in civic cooperation. There is less cooperation in general than in rural Japan, partly because in the American capitalistic environment there is less occasion for it; other reasons are that members of a *kumi* are not at all related, they are comparative strangers to one another and, since everyone came to Hawaii to make money, each man prefers to work his own field for whatever cash he can get out of it.

A notable thing about the *kumi* is that it participates in and comes together on the occasion of weddings and New Year's parties which are primarily occasions for the gathering of the extended family in Japan. It has thus come to replace to a certain extent the relative group of old Japan. At a wedding the *kumi* frequently comes on the first night together with relatives and close friends; at a funeral the help is rendered by the *kumi*, the same as *buraku* in Japan, but it is feasted with the same food as the relatives which is not done in Kumamoto. If there are very few relatives, *kumi* members might help in dressing the corpse, a task restricted to close relatives in Japan.

At New Year's time, instead of the round of extended family banquets, each *kumi* has a banquet, held in rotation at the house of a different *kumi* member each year; whereas such parties are among relatives in rural Japan, the host rotating from year to year.

There are, however, other *kin substitutes* of greater importance than *kumi* members. Of the first generation, as already pointed out, very few have relatives in Kona. The nearest thing to a relative is a man from the same region in Japan. There is a special term for such "same place" people: *tokoro-mon*.<sup>5</sup> Real *tokoro-mon* come from the same county in Japan or better still from the same or neighboring villages. It is these *tokoro* people who are first notified in case of a funeral by couriers from the *kumi* of the deceased. It is *tokoro-mon* who are first invited to a wedding. They are closer than *kumi* people, just as relatives are closer than *buraku* people. The closer to one's home village a man lived, the closer friend he is. A man from the same village is practically a brother. It is the *tokoro* people, in preference to *kumi* members, who are asked to help in preparing the corpse. If a man needs advice or money he goes to a *tokoro-mon* in Kona, as he would to a relative in Japan. While in Japan frequently a young widow is married by

<sup>5</sup> Or *tokoro-no-mon*.

the younger brother of the deceased, in Kona it is a *tokoro-mon*, if there is one available, who performs that duty.

Another function of the *tokoro-mon* comes into play during exchange of labor at the time of fertilizing the coffee lands, an arduous task comparable to rice transplanting in Japan. Just as a man prefers to exchange labor in Japan with a relative, so in Kona he prefers a *tokoro-mon*. In both places, however, a certain amount of exchange labor goes on between close neighbors regardless of kin relationships.

The *buraku* and *kumi* are the neighborhood groups of rural Japan and Kona respectively; the extended family and the *tokoro-mon* of a man are scattered here and there for many miles around. The *buraku* and *kumi* are close geographically and thus have a definite social cohesion. The extended family and *tokoro* groups, while scattered, are still closer than *buraku* people because of blood, and what come to almost the same thing, common origin.

In addition to *tokoro* people another group of relative substitutes consists of people in Kona who worked with one another at some plantation before coming to Kona. Still another group, but not so close, are people who came over on the same boat. Probably one reason these groups of people are less close is that they have been associated together such a short time.

These kin substitutes, especially the important *tokoro-mon*, apply in particular to the first generation and will probably die out in fifteen or twenty years with the demise of that first generation whose average age in Kona today is sixty years. Real kin groups are being established among the second and third generations, but along rather different, more western patterns than the original Japanese kin groups. The second generation has already acquired a group of relatives through siblings and marriage. They have a tendency to do away with some of the more elaborate rituals of funerals and other kinship gatherings.

The data from Kona tend to confirm the thesis set forth at the beginning of this paper. To summarize briefly: Two important aspects of social organization are kin and geographical group relationships. When a change takes place in the society or when members of a society form a new group in a different locality, there is an attempt to keep or recreate the old kin and local groups. It is comparatively easy to rearrange the local group, though frequently many of its old functions are lost. To recreate the old kin organization resort may be taken to *kin substitutes* such as neighbors or, more important, same-place-of-origin people, for instance the *tokoro-mon* of the Japanese coffee farmers in Hawaii.

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